ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND THE DOCTRINE OF PROPHETIC KABBALISM

1

As from the year 1200, the Kabbalists begin to emerge as a distinct mystical group which, while still not numerically significant, had nonetheless attained considerable prominence in many parts of Southern France and Spain. The main tendencies of the new movement are clearly defined and the modern student may without difficuity trace its development from the early stages about 1200 to the Golden Age of Kabbalism in Spain at the close of the thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries. An extensive literature has preserved for us the highlights of thought and personalities dominating the new mysticism which for five or six generations was to exercise an ever increasing influence on Jewish life. Some of the outstanding leaders, it is true, are but lightly sketched and we have not sufficient data to give us a clear picture of them all, but research of the past thirty years has brought an unexpected harvest of illuminating facts. Nor must it be forgotten that each of the leading figures had his own clearly defined physiognomy and there was no vagueness of outline to lead to confusion of identity. The same clear lines of demarcation apply also to tendencies each of which can be distinguished by terminology as well as by the nuance of its mystic thought.

This demarcation is intelligible enough when we review the growth of mystic tradition. Teaching by word of mouth and implication rather than assertion, was the rule. The numerous allusions found in this field of literature, such as "I cannot say more", "I have already explained to you by word of mouth", "this is only for those familiar with the 'secret wisdom'" are not mere flights of rhetoric. This vagueness, indeed, is the reason why many passages have remained obscure to the present day. In many cases, whispers, and

that in esoteric hints, were the only medium of transmission. It is therefore not surprising that such methods should lead to innovations, sometimes startling, and that differentiations arose between the various schools. Even the devout pupil who leaned heavily on the tradition of his master, found before him a wide field for interpretation and amplification if he were so inclined. Nor should it be forgotten that the primary source was not always a mere mortal. Supernatural illumination also plays its part in the history of Kabbalism and innovations are made not only on the basis of new interpretations of ancient lore but as a result of fresh inspiration or revelation, or even of a dream. A sentence from Isaac Hacohen of Soria (about 1270) illustrates the twin sources recognized by the Kabbalists as authoritative. "In our generation there are but a few, here and there, who have received *tradition* from the ancients . . . or have been vouchsafed the grace of divine *inspiration*." Tradition and intuition are bound together and this would explain why Kabbalism could be deeply conservative and intensely revolutionary. Even "traditionalists" do not shrink from innovations, sometimes far-reaching, which are confidently set forth as interpretations of the ancients or as revelation of a mystery which Providence had seen fit to conceal from previous generations.

This duality colors Kabbalistic literature for the succeding hundred years. Some scholars are staunch conservatives who will say nothing that has not been handed down by their masters and that only in enigmatic brevity. Others frankly delight in innovations based on fresh interpretation and we have the admission of Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona:

> Were they not the findings of my heart
> I had believed . . . this Moses from Sinai did impart.

A third class propound their views, either laconically or at length, without citing any authority, while yet a fourth, such as Jacob Hacohen and Abraham Abulafia, lean frankly on divine revelation. But it is not surprising that so many Kabbalists, illuminates as well as commentators, display a reticence which is among the factors that led directly to the revival of pseudepigraphic forms in Kabbalistic literature. This pseudepigraphy was, in my opinion, based on two impulses, psychological and historic. The psychological stimulus emanates from modesty and the feeling that a Kabbalist who had been vouchsafed the gift of inspiration should shun ostentation.

The historic impulse, on the other hand, was bound up with the desire to influence the writer's contemporaries. Hence the search for historic continuity and the sanctification of authority, and the tendency to lend to Kabbalistic literature the lustre of some great name from Biblical or Talmudic times. The Zohar, or the "Book of Splendor", is the most famous, but by no means the sole example, of such pseudepigraphy. But not all Kabbalists, fortunately for us, preferred anonymity and it is thanks to them that we are able to place the authors of the pseudepigraphic writings in their proper historic setting. I think it will be appropriate to sum up the contribution of Spanish Kabbalism to the treasury of Jewish mysticism by characterizing the most outspoken representatives of its main currents, the outspoken illuminates and ecstatics and, on the other hand, the masters of pseudepigraphy.

In the opening lecture I referred to the fact that Jewish mystics are inclined to be reticent about the hidden regions of the religious life, including the sphere of experiences generally described as ecstasy, mystical union with God, and the like. Experiences of this kind lie at the bottom of many Kabbalistic writings, though not, of course, of all. Sometimes, however, this fact is not even mentioned by the author. Of one bulky volume, Rabbi Mordecai Ashkenazi's book *Eshel Abraham*,[1] I have been able to prove for instance that it was written against a background of visionary dreams. But for the fact that one of the author's notebooks, a kind of mystical diary, has come down to us, it would be impossible to guess this, for it is in vain that one looks for a single allusion to the source of his ideas.[2] The treatment of the subject remains throughout strictly objective. Other Kabbalists deal at length with the question of the individual's approach to mystical knowledge, without any reference to their own experience. But even writings of this kind, if they are really manuals of the more advanced stages of mystical practice and technique, have seldom been published. To this class belongs, for instance, a penetrating analysis of various forms and stages of mystical rapture and ecstasy written by Rabbi Dov Baer (died 1827), son of the famous Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi, the founder of *Habad*-Hasidism, in his *Kuntras Ha-Hithpaaluth*—roughly translated "An Enquiry into Ecstasy."[3] Or take the case of the famous Kabbalist, Rabbi Hayim Vital Calabrese (1543-1620), the leading disciple of Rabbi Isaac Luria, himself one of the central figures of

later Kabbalism. This celebrated mystic is the author of an essay called *Shaare Kedushah,* i. e., "The Gates of Holiness", which includes a brief and easily comprehensible introduction into the mystical way of life, beginning with a description of certain indispensable moral qualities and leading up to a whole compendium of Kabbalistic ethics. The first three chapters of the little book have been printed many times, and on the whole they make interesting reading. So far so good. But Vital has added a fourth chapter, in which he sets out in detail various ways of imbuing the soul with the holy spirit and prophetic wisdom, and which, by virtue of its copious quotations from older authors, is really an anthology of the teachings of the older Kabbalists on the technique of ecstasy. You will not, however, find it in any of the printed editions of the book; in its place the following words have been inserted: "Thus speaks the printer: This fourth part will not be printed, for it is all holy names and secret mysteries which it would be unseemly to publish." And in fact, this highly interesting chapter has survived in only a few handwritten copies.[4] It is the same, or almost the same, with other writings which describe either ecstatical experiences or the technique of preparing oneself for them.

Still more remarkable is the fact that even when we turn to the unpublished writings of Jewish mystics, we find that ecstatic experience does not play the all-important part one might expect. It is true that the position is somewhat different in the writings of the early mystics who lived before the development of Kabbalism and whose ideas have been outlined in the second lecture. Instead of the usual theory of mysticism, we are treated in these documents of Jewish Gnosticism to enthusiastic descriptions of the soul's ascent to the Celestial Throne and of the objects it contemplates; in addition, the technique of producing this ecstatic frame of mind is described in detail. In later Kabbalistic literature these aspects tend more and more to be relegated to the background. The soul's ascension does not, of course, disappear altogether. The visionary element of mysticism which corresponds to a certain psychological disposition, breaks through again and again. But, on the whole, Kabbalistic meditation and contemplation takes on a more spiritualized aspect. Moreover, the fact remains that, even leaving aside the distinction between earlier and later documents of Jewish mysticism, it is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God,

in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submersion in the divine stream. Even in this ecstatic frame of mind, the Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of the distance between the Creator and His creature. The latter is joined to the former, and the point where the two meet is of the greatest interest to the mystic, but he does not regard it as constituting anything so extravagant as identity of Creator and creature.

Nothing seems to me to express better this sense of the distance between God and man, than the Hebrew term which in our literature is generally used for what is otherwise called *unio mystica.* I mean the word *devekuth,* which signifies "adhesion," or "being joined," viz., to God. This is regarded as the ultimate goal of religious perfection. *Devekuth* can be ecstasy, but its meaning is far more comprehensive. It is a perpetual being-with-God, an intimate union and conformity of the human and the divine will.[5] Yet even the rapturous descriptions of this state of mind which abound in later Hasidic literature retain a proper sense of distance, or, if you like, of incommensurateness. Many writers deliberately place *devekuth* above any form of ecstasy which seeks the extinction of the world and the self in the union with God.[6] I am not going to deny that there have also been tendencies of the opposite kind[7]; an excellent description of the trend towards pure pantheism, or rather acosmism, can be found in a well-known Yiddish novel, F. Schneerson's *Hayim Grawitzer,*[8] and at least one of the famous leaders of Lithuanian Hasidism, Rabbi Aaron Halevi of Starosselje, can be classed among the acosmists. But I do maintain that such tendencies are not characteristic of Jewish mysticism. It is a significant fact that the most famous and influential book of our mystical literature, the Zohar, has little use for ecstasy; the part it plays both in the descriptive and in the dogmatical sections of this voluminous work is entirely subordinate. Allusions to it there are,[9] but it is obvious that other and different aspects of mysticism are much nearer to the author's heart. Part of the extraordinary success of the Zohar can probably be traced to this attitude of restraint which struck a familiar chord in the Jewish heart.

2

Considering all the aforementioned facts, it is hardly surprising that the outstanding representative of ecstatic Kabbalism has also

been the least popular of all the great Kabbalists. I refer to Abraham Abulafia, whose theories and doctrines will form the main subject of this lecture. By a curious coincidence, which is perhaps rather more than a coincidence, Abulafia's principal works and the Zohar were written almost simultaneously. It is no exaggeration to say that each marks the culminating point in the development of two opposing schools of thought in Spanish Kabbalism, schools which I should like to call the ecstatic and the theosophical. Of the latter I shall have something to say in the following lectures. For all their differences, the two belong together and, only if both are understood, do we obtain something like a comprehensive picture of Spanish Kabbalism.

Unfortunately, not one of Abulafia's numerous and often voluminous treatises has been published by the Kabbalists, while the Zohar runs into seventy or eighty editions. Not until Jellinek, one of the small band of nineteenth century Jewish scholars who probed deeper into the problem of Jewish mysticism, published three of his minor writings and some extracts from others, did any of them appear in print.[10] This is all the more remarkable as Abulafia was a very prolific writer who, on one occasion, refers to himself as the author of twenty-six Kabbalistic and twenty-two prophetic works.[11] Of the former, many still exist; I know of more than twenty, and it is a fact that a few among them enjoy a great reputation among Kabbalists to this day.[12]

While some of the more orthodox Kabbalists, such as Rabbi Jehudah Hayat (about 1500 A. D.) attacked Abaluafia with vehemence and warned their readers against his books[13], their criticism appears to have aroused only a faint echo.[14] At any rate, Abulafia's influence as a guide to mysticism continued to remain very great. He owed this to the remarkable combination of logical power, pellucid style, deep insight and highly colored abstruseness which characterizes his writings. Since, as we shall have occasion to see, he was convinced of having found the way to prophetic inspiration, and from there to the true knowledge of the Divine, he took pains to use a simple and direct style which went straight to the heart of every attentive reader. He went so far as to include among his works a number of what one might call manuals, which not only set out his theory but also constitute a guide to action. In fact they can be practised so easily as to go far beyond his intentions; the

point is that although Abulafia himself never thought of going beyond the pale of rabbinic Jewry, his teachings can be put into effect by practically everyone who tries. That probably is also one of the reasons why the Kabbalists refrained from publishing them. Very likely they feared that once this technique of meditation, which had a very broad appeal, became publicly known, its use would no longer be restricted to the elect. Certainly the success of Abulafia's writing made the ever-present danger of a clash between the mystical revelation and that of Mount Sinai seem more real than ever. Thus, the whole school of practical mysticism, which Abulafia himself called Prophetic Kabbalism, continued to lead an underground life. By witholding his writings from the public, the Kabbalists undoubtedly sought to eliminate the danger that people might go in for ecstatic adventures without due preparation and lay dangerous claims to visionary powers.

Generally speaking, lay mystics—self-taught and untutored by Rabbinism—have always been a potential source of heretical thought. Jewish mysticism tried to meet this danger by stipulating in principle that entry into the domain of mystical thought and practice should be reserved to rabbinic scholars.[15] In actual fact, however, there has been no lack of Kabbalists who either had no learning whatsoever, or who lacked the proper rabbinic training. Thus enabled to look at Judaism from a fresh angle, these men frequently produced highly important and interesting ideas, and so there grew up, side by side with the scholarly Kabbalah of the Rabbis, another line of prophetic and visionary mystics. The pristine enthusiasm of these early ecstatics frequently lifted the heavy lid of rabbinic scholasticism, and for all their readiness to compromise occasionally came into conflict with it. It is also worth pointing out that during the classical period of Kabbalism, i. e. up to 1300 A. D., as distinct from later periods, its representatives were, as a rule, not men whom their contemporaries regarded as outstanding Rabbis. Great Kabbalists, who also contributed to strictly rabbinical literature, men like Moses Nahmanides or Solomon ben Adret, were rare.[16] Yet the Kabbalists were, in the great majority, men of rabbinic education. Abulafia marks an exception, having had little contact with higher rabbinic learning. All the more extensive, however, was his knowledge of contemporary philosophy; and his writ-

ings, especially those of a systematic character, show him to have been, by the standards of his age, a highly erudite man.

3

About Abulafia's life and his person we are informed almost exclusively by his own writings.[17] Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia was born in Saragossa in 1240, and spent his youth in Tudela, in the province of Navarre. His father taught him the Bible with its commentaries as well as grammar and some Mishnah and Talmud. When he was eighteen years old he lost his father. Two years later he left Spain and went to the Near East in order, as he writes, to discover the legendary stream Sambation beyond which the lost ten tribes were supposed to dwell. Warlike disturbances in Syria and Palestine soon drove him back from Acre to Europe, where he spent about ten years in Greece and Italy.

During these years of travel, he steeped himself in philosophy and conceived for Maimonides an admiration that proved lifelong. For him there was no antithesis between mysticism and the doctrines of Maimonides. He rather considered his own mystical theory as the final step forward from the "Guide of the Perplexed" to which he wrote a curious mystical commentary. This affinity of the mystic with the great rationalist has its astounding parallel—as the most recent research has shown—in the relationship of the great Christian mystic Meister Eckhart to Maimonides, by whom he seems to be much more influenced than was any scholastic before him. While the great scholastics, such as Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus, although having learned and, indeed, accepted much from him, none the less frequently oppose him, the Rabbi is—as Josef Koch has ascertained[18]—for the great Christian mystic a literary authority to whom Augustine at best is superior. In the same way Abulafia tries to connect his theories with those of Maimonides.[19] According to him, only the "Guide" and the "Book of Creation" together represent the true theory of Kabbalism.[20]

Coincidentally with these studies he seems to have been deeply occupied with the Kabbalistic doctrines of his age, without, however, being overmuch impressed by them. About 1270 he returned to Spain for three or four years, during which he immersed himself completely in mystical research. In Barcelona he began to study the book *Yetsirah* and twelve commentaries to it showing both

philosophic and Kabbalistic inclinations.[21] Here, too, he seems to have come into contact with a conventicle the members of which believed they could gain access to the profoundest secrets of mystical cosmology and theology "by the three methods of Kabbalah, being *Gematria, Notarikon,* and *Temurah.*" Abulafia especially mentions one Baruch Togarmi, precentor, as his teacher, who initiated him into the true meaning of the *Sefer Yetsirah.* We still possess a treatise of this Kabbalist—"The Keys to Kabbalah"—about the mysteries of the book *Yetsirah.*[22] Most of them, he says, he felt not entitled to publish, nor even to write down. "I want to write it down and I am not allowed to do it, I do not want to write it down and cannot entirely desist; so I write and I pause, and I allude to it again in later passages, and this is my procedure."[23]

Abulafia himself at times wrote in this vein, so typical of mystical literature. By immersing himself in the mystical technique of his teacher, Abulafia found his own way. It was at the age of 31, in Barcelona, that he was overcome by the prophetic spirit. He obtained knowledge of the true name of God, and had visions of which he himself, however, says, in 1285, that they were partly sent by the demons to confuse him, so that he "groped about like a blind man at midday for fifteen years with Satan to his right." Yet on the other hand he was entirely convinced of the truth of his prophetic knowledge. He travelled for some time in Spain, expounding his new doctrine, but in 1274 he left his native country for the second and last time, and from then on led a vagrant life in Italy and Greece. It was still in Spain that he exerted a deep influence upon the young Joseph Gikatila who later became one of the most eminent Spanish Kabbalists. In Italy too, he found disciples in various places and taught them his new way, partly in pursuit of the philosophy of Maimonides. Quick enthusiasm about his disciples turned quickly into disappointment and he complained bitterly of the unworthiness of some of those whom he had taught in Capua.[24]

He became the author of prophetical writings wherein he prefers to designate himself by names of the same numerical value as his original name of Abraham. He prefers to call himself Raziel or Zechariah. Only in the ninth year after the beginning of his prophetic visions he began, as he says himself,[25] to compose distinctly prophetic writings, although he had written before that time other tracts on different branches of science, among them "writings on the

mysteries of Kabbalah."[26] In the year 1280, inspired with his mission, he undertook a most venturesome and unexplained task: He went to Rome to present himself before the Pope and to confer with him "in the name of Jewry." It seems that at that time he nursed Messianic ideas. Well may he have read of such a mission of the Messiah to the Pope in a then very widely known booklet.[27] This contained the disputation of the famous Kabbalist Moses ben Nahman with the apostate Pablo Christiani in the year 1263. Here Nahmanides said: "When the time of the end will have come, the Messiah will at God's command come to the Pope and ask of him the liberation of his people, and only then will the Messiah be considered really to have come, but not before that."

Abulafia himself relates[28] that the Pope had given orders "when Raziel would come to Rome to confer with him in the name of Jewry, to arrest him and not to admit him into his presence at all, but to lead him out of town and there to burn him." But Abulafia, although informed of this, paid no attention, but rather gave himself up to his meditations and mystical preparations and on the strength of his visions wrote a book which he later called: "Book of Testimony," in remembrance of his miraculous rescue. For as he prepared himself to come before the Pope, "two mouths," as he obscurely expresses himself, grew on him, and when he entered the city-gate, he learned that the Pope—it was Nicholas III.—had suddenly died during the night. Abulafia was held in the College of the Franciscans for twenty-eight days, but was then set free.

Abulafia then wandered about Italy for a number of years. Of these he seems to have spent several in Sicily, where he remained longer than in any other place. Almost all his extant works were written during his Italian period, particularly between the years 1279 and 1291. We are altogether ignorant of his fate after the year 1291. Of his prophetic, or inspired, writings only his apocalypse, *Sefer ha-Oth*, the "Book of the Sign," a strange and not altogether comprehensible book, has survived.[29] On the other hand, most of his theoretical and doctrinal treatises are still extant, some of them in a considerable number of manuscripts.

He seems to have made many enemies by claiming prophetical inspiration and antagonizing his contemporaries in various other ways, for he very often complains of hostility and persecution. He mentions denunciations by Jews to Christian authorities[30], which

may perhaps be explained by the fact that he represented himself as a prophet to Christians as well. He writes that he found among them some who believed more in God than the Jews to whom God had sent him first.[31] In two places Abulafia tells of his connection with non-Jewish mystics.[32] Once, he relates, he talked with them about the three methods of the interpretation of the Torah (literal, allegoric, and mystic), and he noted their agreement with one another when conversing with them confidentially "and I saw that they belong to the category of the 'pious of the gentiles', and that the words of the fools of whatever religion need not be heeded, for the Torah has been handed over to the masters of true knowledge."[33] Another time he tells of a dispute with a Christian scholar with whom he had made friends and in whose mind he had implanted the desire for the knowledge of the Name of God. "And it is not necessary to reveal more about it."[34]

These connections of Abulafia's do not, however, testify to a special inclination to Christian ideas as some scholars have assumed.[35] On the contrary, his antagonism to Christianity is very outspoken and intense.[36] He sometimes, indeed, intentionally makes use—among many other associations—of formulae which sound quite trinitarian, immediately giving them a meaning which has nothing whatsoever to do with the trinitarian idea of God.[37] But his predilection for paradox as well as his prophetic pretensions alienated from him the Kabbalists of a more strictly orthodox orientation. And indeed he acutely criticizes the Kabbalists of his times and their symbolism insofar as it is not backed by individual mystical experience.[38] On the other hand, some of his writings are devoted to the refutation of attacks directed against him by 'orthodox' Kabbalists.[39] But "poverty, exile, and imprisonment" were powerless to make Abulafia, a proud and unbending spirit, abandon the standpoint to which his personal experience of things divine had led him.

In the preface to one of his works, the main part of which has been lost, he compares his mission and his place among his contemporaries with that of the prophet Isaiah. He tells how a voice called him twice: "Abraham, Abraham" and, he continues, "I said: Here am I! Thereupon he instructed me in the right way, woke me from my slumber and inspired me to write something new. There had been nothing like it in my day." He realized only too well that his gospel would make enemies for him among the Jewish leaders.

Nevertheless he submitted to this "and I constrained my will and dared to reach beyond my grasp. They called me heretic and unbeliever because I had resolved to worship God in truth and not as those who walk in darkness. Sunken in the abyss, they and their kind would have delighted to engulf me in their vanities and their dark deeds. But God forbid that I should forsake the way of truth for that of falsehood."[40]

Yet for all his pride in the achievement of prophetic inspiration and his knowledge of the great Name of God, there was combined in his character meekness and a love of peace. Jellinek rightly points out that his moral character must be estimated very highly. When accepting desciples to his Kabbalah he is extremely fastidious in his requirements as to a high morality and steadiness of character and it may be concluded from his writings even in their ecstatic parts that he himself possessed many of the qualities he asked for in others.[41] He who gains the deepest knowledge of the true essentials of reality—so he says in one place—at the same time acquires the deepest humility and modesty.[42]

It is one of the many oddities of the history of modern research into Kabbalism that Abulafia, of all men, has sometimes been made out to be the anonymous author of the Zohar. This hypothesis, which still finds its supporters, was first advanced by M. H. Landauer, who—a hundred years ago—was the first to point to Abulafia at all. He says: "I found a strange man with whose writings the contents of the Zohar coincide most accurately down to the minutest details. This fact struck me at once with the first writing of his which came into my hands. But now that I have read many of his works and have come to know his life, his principles, and his character, there cannot exist any longer even the slightest doubt that we now have the author of the Zohar."[43] This seems to me an extraordinary example of how a judgment proclaimed with conviction as certainly true may nevertheless be entirely wrong in every detail. The truth is that no two things could be more different than the outlook of the Zohar and that of Abulafia.

4

I shall now try to give a brief synthetic description, one after the other, of the main points of his mystical theory, his doctrine of the search for ecstasy and for prophetic inspiration.[44] Its basic

principles have been upheld with varying modifications by all those among the Kabbalists who found in Abulafia a congenial spirit, and its characteristic mixture of emotionalism and rationalism sets its seal on one of the main trends of Kabbalism.

Abulafia's aim, as he himself has expressed it, is "to unseal the soul, to untie the knots which bind it."[45] "All the inner forces and the hidden souls in man are distributed and differentiated in the bodies. It is, however, in the nature of all of them that when their knots are untied they return to their origin, which is one without any duality and which comprises the multiplicity."[46] The "untying" is, as it were, the return from multiplicity and separation towards the original unity. As a symbol of the great mystic liberation of the soul from the fetters of sensuality the "untying of the knots" occurs also in the theosophy of northern Buddhism. Only recently a French scholar published a Tibetan didactic tract the title of which may be translated: "Book on Untying Knots".[47]

What does this symbol mean in Abulafia's terminology? It means that there are certain barriers which separate the personal existence of the soul from the stream of cosmic life—personified for him in the *intellectus agens* of the philosophers, which runs through the whole of creation. There is a dam which keeps the soul confined within the natural and normal borders of human existence and protects it against the flood of the divine stream, which flows beneath it or all around it; the same dam, however, also prevents the soul from taking cognizance of the Divine. The "seals," which are impressed on the soul, protect it against the flood and guarantee its normal functioning. Why is the soul, as it were, sealed up? Because, answers Abulafia, the ordinary day-to-day life of human beings, their perception of the sensible world, fills and impregnates the mind with a multitude of sensible forms or images (called, in the language of mediaeval philosophers, "natural forms"). As the mind perceives all kinds of gross natural objects and admits their images into its consciousness, it creates for itself, out of this natural function, a certain mode of existence which bears the stamp of finiteness. The normal life of the soul, in other words, is kept within the limits determined by our sensory perceptions and emotions, and as long as it is full of these, it finds it extremely difficult to perceive the existence of spiritual forms and things divine. The problem, therefore, is to find a way of helping the soul to perceive more than the forms of nature,

without its becoming blinded and overwhelmed by the divine light, and the solution is suggested by the old adage "whoever is full of himself has no room for God." All that which occupies the natural self of man must either be made to disappear or must be transformed in such a way as to render it transparent for the inner spiritual reality, whose contours will then become perceptible through the customary shell of natural things.

Abulafia, therefore, casts his eyes round for higher forms of perception which, instead of blocking the way to the soul's own deeper regions, facilitate access to them and throw them into relief. He wants the soul to concentrate on highly abstract spiritual matters, which will not encumber it by pushing their own particular importance into the foreground and thus render illusory the whole purpose of mental purgation. If, for instance, I observe a flower, a bird, or some other concrete thing or event, and begin to think about it, the object of my reflection has an importance or attractiveness of its own. I am thinking of this particular flower, bird, etc. Then how can the soul learn to visualize God with the help of objects whose nature is of such a sort as to arrest the attention of the spectator and deflect it from its purpose? The early Jewish mystic knows of no object of contemplation in which the soul immerses itself until it reaches a state of ecstasy, such as the Passion in Christian mysticism.

Abraham Abulafia is, therefore, compelled to look for an, as it were, absolute object for meditating upon; that is to say, one capable of stimulating the soul's deeper life and freeing it from ordinary perceptions. In other words, he looks for something capable of acquiring the highest importance, without having much particular, or if possible any, importance of its own. An object which fulfills all these conditions he believes himself to have found in the Hebrew alphabet, in the letters which make up the written language. It is not enough, though an important step forward, that the soul should be occupied with the meditation of abstract truths, for even there it remains too closely bound to their specific meaning. Rather is it Abulafia's purpose to present it with something not merely abstract but also not determinable as an object in the strict sense, for everything so determined has an importance and an individuality of its own. Basing himself upon the abstract and non-corporeal nature of script, he develops a theory of the mystical contemplation of letters

and their configurations, as the constituents of God's name. For this is the real and, if I may say so, the peculiarly Jewish object of mystical contemplation: The Name of God, which is something absolute, because it reflects the hidden meaning and totality of existence; the Name through which everything else acquires its meaning and which yet to the human mind has no concrete, particular meaning of its own. In short, Abulafia believes that whoever succeeds in making this great Name of God, the least concrete and perceptible thing in the world, the object of his meditation, is on the way to true mystical ecstasy.[48]

Starting from this concept, Abulafia expounds a peculiar discipline which he calls *Hokhmath ha-Tseruf,* i. e. "science of the combination of letters." This is described as a methodical guide to meditation with the aid of letters and their configurations. The individual letters of their combinations need have no 'meaning' in the ordinary sense; it is even an advantage if they are meaningless, as in that case they are less likely to distract us. True, they are not really meaningless to Abulafia, who accepts the Kabbalistic doctrine of divine language as the substance of reality. According to this doctrine, as I have mentioned in the first lecture, all things exist only by virtue of their degree of participation in the great Name of God, which manifests itself throughout the whole Creation. There is a language which expresses the pure thought of God and the letters of this spiritual language are the elements both of the most fundamental spiritual reality and of the profoundest understanding and knowledge. Abulafia's mysticism is a course in this divine language.

The purpose of this discipline then is to stimulate, with the aid of methodical meditation, a new state of consciousness; this state can best be defined as an harmonious movement of pure thought, which has severed all relation to the senses. Abulafia himself has already quite correctly compared it with music. Indeed, the systematic practice of meditation as taught by him, produces a sensation closely akin to that of listening to musical harmonies. The science of combination is a music of pure thought, in which the alphabet takes the place of the musical scale. The whole system shows a fairly close resemblance to musical principles, applied not to sounds but to thought in meditation. We find here compositions and modifications of motifs and their combination in every possible variety. This is what Abulafia himself says about it in one of his unpublished

writings: "Know that the method of *Tseruf* can be compared to music; for the ear hears sounds from various combinations, in accordance with the character of the melody and the instrument. Also, two different instruments can form a combination, and if the sounds combine, the listener's ear registers a pleasant sensation in acknowledging their difference. The strings touched by the right or left hand move, and the sound is sweet to the ear. And from the ear the sensation travels to the heart, and from the heart to the spleen (the centre of emotion), and enjoyment of the different melodies produces ever new delight. It is impossible to produce it except through the combination of sounds, and the same is true of the combination of letters. It touches the first string, which is comparable to the first letter, and proceeds to the second, third, fourth and fifth, and the various sounds combine. And the secrets, which express themselves in these combinations, delight the heart which acknowledges its God and is filled with ever fresh joy."[49]

The directed activity of the adept engaged in combining and separating the letters in his meditation, composing whole motifs on separate groups, combining several of them with one another and enjoying their combinations in every direction, is therefore for Abulafia not more senseless or incomprehensible than that of a composer. Just as—to quote Schopenhauer—the musician expresses in wordless sounds "the world once again," and ascends to endless heights and descends to endless depths, so the mystic: To him the closed doors of the soul open in the music of pure thought which is no longer bound to "sense," and in the ecstasy of the deepest harmonies which originate in the movement of the letters of the great Name, they throw open the way to God.

This science of the combination of letters and the practice of controlled meditation is, according to Abulafia, nothing less than the "mystical logic" which corresponds to the inner harmony of thought in its movement towards God.[50] The world of letters, which reveals itself in this discipline, is the true world of bliss.[51] Every letter represents a whole world to the mystic who abandons himself to its contemplation.[52] Every language, not only Hebrew, is transformed into a transcendental medium of the one and only language of God. And as every language issues from a corruption of the aboriginal language—Hebrew—they all remain related to it. In all his books Abulafia likes to play on Latin, Greek, or Italian words

to support his ideas. For, in the last resort, every spoken word consists of sacred letters, and the combination, separation and reunion of letters reveal profound mysteries to the Kabbalist, and unravel to him the secret of the relation of all languages to the holy tongue.[53]

5

Abulafia's great manuals, such as "The Book of Eternal Life,"[54] "The Light of Intellect,"[55] "The Words of Beauty" and 'The Book of Combination"[56] are systematic guides to the theory and practice of this system of mystical counterpoint. Through its methodical exercise the soul is accustomed to the perception of higher forms with which it gradually saturates itself. Abulafia lays down a method which leads from the actual articulation of the permutations and combinations, to their writing and to the contemplation of the written, and finally from writing to thinking and to the pure meditation of all these objects of the "mystical logic."

Articulation, *mivta,* writing, *miktav,* and thought, *mahshav,* thus form three superimposed layers of meditation. Letters are the elements of every one of them, elements which manifest themselves in ever more spiritual forms. From the motion of the letters of thought result the truths of reason. But the mystic will not stop here. He differentiates further between matter and form of the letters in order to approach closer to their spiritual nucleus; he immerses himself in the combinations of the pure forms of the letters, which now, being purely spiritual forms, impress themselves upon his soul. He endeavours to comprehend the connections between words and names formed by the Kabbalistic methods of exegesis.[57] The numerical value of words, *gematria,* is here of particular importance.

To this must be added another point: the modern reader of these writings will be most astonished to find a detailed description of a method which Abulafia and his followers call *dillug* and *kefitsah,* "jumping" or "skipping" viz., from one conception to another. In fact this is nothing else than a very remarkable method of using associations as a way of meditation. It is not wholly the "free play of association" as known to psychoanalysis; rather it is the way of passing from one association to another determined by certain rules which are, however, sufficiently lax. Every "jump" opens a new sphere, defined by certain formal, *not* material, characteristics.

Within this sphere the mind may freely associate. The "jumping" unites, therefore, elements of free and guided association and is said to assure quite extraordinary results as far as the "widening of the consciousness" of the initiate is concerned. The "jumping" brings to light hidden processes of the mind, "it liberates us from the prison of the natural sphere and leads us to the boundaries of the divine sphere." All the other, more simple, methods of meditation serve only as a preparation for this highest grade which contains and supersedes all the others.[88]

Abulafia describes in several places the preparations for meditation and ecstasy, as well as what happens to the adept at the height of rapture. The report of one of his disciples which I quote below, confirms his statements. Abulafia himself says in one place[89]:

"Be prepared for thy God, oh Israelite! Make thyself ready to direct thy heart to God alone. Cleanse the body and choose a lonely house where none shall hear thy voice. Sit there in thy closet and do not reveal thy secret to any man. If thou canst, do it by day in the house, but it is best if thou completest it during the night. In the hour when thou preparest thyself to speak with the Creator and thou wishest Him to reveal His might to thee, then be careful to abstract all thy thought from the vanities of this world. Cover thyself with thy prayer shawl and put *Tefillin* on thy head and hands that thou mayest be filled with awe of the Shekhinah which is near thee. Cleanse thy clothes, and, if possible, let all thy garments be white, for all this is helpful in leading the heart towards the fear of God and the love of God. If it be night, kindle many lights, until all be bright. Then take ink, pen and a table to thy hand and remember that thou art about to serve God in joy of the gladness of heart. Now begin to combine a few or many letters, to permute and to combine them until thy heart be warm. Then be mindful of their movements and of what thou canst bring forth by moving them. And when thou feelest that thy heart is already warm and when thou seest that by combinations of letters thou canst grasp new things which by human tradition or by thyself thou wouldst not be able to know and when thou art thus prepared to receive the influx of divine power which flows into thee, then turn all thy true thought to imagine the Name and His exalted angels in thy heart as if they were human beings sitting or standing about thee. And feel thyself like an envoy whom the king and his ministers are

to send on a mission, and he is waiting to hear something about his mission from their lips, be it from the king himself, be it from his servants. Having imagined this very vividly, turn thy whole mind to understand with thy thoughts the many things which will come into thy heart through the letters imagined. Ponder them as a whole and in all their detail, like one to whom a parable or a dream is being related, or who meditates on a deep problem in a scientific book, and try thus to interpret what thou shalt hear that it may as far as possible accord with thy reason . . . And all this will happen to thee after having flung away tablet and quill or after they will have dropped from thee because of the intensity of thy thought. And know, the stronger the intellectual influx within thee, the weaker will become thy outer and thy inner parts. Thy whole body will be seized by an extremely strong trembling, so that thou wilt think that surely thou art about to die, because thy soul, overjoyed with its knowledge, will leave thy body. And be thou ready at this moment consciously to choose death, and then thou shalt know that thou hast come far enough to receive the influx. And then wishing to honor the glorious Name by serving it with the life of body and soul, veil thy face and be afraid to look at God. Then return to the matters of the body, rise and eat and drink a little, or refresh thyself with a pleasant odor, and restore thy spirit to its sheath until another time, and rejoice at thy lot and know that God loveth thee!"

By training itself to turn its back upon all natural objects and to live in the pure contemplation of the divine Name, the mind is gradually prepared for the final transformation. The seals, which keep it locked up in its normal state and shut off the divine light, are relaxed, and the mystic finally dispenses with them altogether. The hidden spring of divine life is released. But now that the mind has been prepared for it, this irruption of the divine influx does not overwhelm it and throw it into a state of confusion and self-abandonment. On the contrary, having climbed the seventh and last step of the mystical ladder,[60] and reached the summit, the mystic consciously perceives and becomes part of the world of divine light, whose radiance illuminates his thoughts and heals his heart. This is the stage of prophetic vision, in which the ineffable mysteries of the divine Name and the whole glory of its realm reveal themselves to

the illuminate. Of them the prophet speaks in words which extoll the greatness of God and bear the reflection of His image.

Ecstasy, which Abulafia regards as the highest reward of mystical contemplation, is not, therefore, to be confused with semi-conscious raving and complete self-annihilation. These uncontrolled forms of ecstasy he treats with a certain disdain and even regards them as dangerous. Rationally prepared ecstasy, too, comes suddenly[61] and cannot be enforced, but when the bolts are shot back and the seals taken off, the mind is already prepared for the 'light of the intellect' which pours in. Abulafia, therefore, frequently warns against the mental and even physical dangers of unsystematic meditation and similar practices. In combining the letters, every one of which —according to the book *Yetsirah*—is co-ordinated to a special member of the body "one has to be most careful not to move a consonant or vowel from its position, for if he errs in reading the letter commanding a certain member, that member may be torn away and may change its place or alter its nature immediately and be transformed into a different shape so that in consequence that person may become a cripple."[62] In the account I am going to quote at the end Abulafia's disciple also mentions spasmodic distortions of the face.

Abulafia lays great emphasis on the newness and singularity of his prophecy. "Know that most of the vision which Raziel saw are based on the Name of God and its gnosis, and also on his new revelation which took place on earth now in his days and the like there was not from the time of Adam until his."[63] The prophets who draw from the knowledge of the true name, are at the same time, to his mind, the true lovers. The identity of prophecy with the love of God also finds its proof in the mysticism of numbers, and he who serves God out of pure love, is on the right path towards prophecy.[64] That is why the Kabbalists with whom the pure fear of God turns into love, are for him the genuine disciples of the prophets.[65]

6

In the opinion of Abulafia, his own doctrine of prophetic ecstasy is in the last resort nothing but the doctrine of prophecy advanced by the Jewish philosophers, more especially by Maimonides, who also defines prophecy as a temporary union of the human and the

divine intellect, deliberately brought about through systematic preparation. The prophetic faculty, according to this doctrine, represents the union of the human intellect at the highest stage of its development, with a cosmic influence normally domiciled in the intelligible world, the so-called active intellect (*intellectus agens*). The influx of this active intellect into the soul manifests itself as prophetic vision. Abulafia is concerned to prove the substantial identity of this theory of prophecy, which was widely recognized in the Middle Ages, with his own doctrine.[66] These rationalizations cannot, however, obscure the fact that his teachings represent but a Judaized version of that ancient spiritual technique which has found its classical expression in the practices of the Indian mystics who follow the system known as *Yoga*. To cite only one instance out of many, an important part in Abulafia's system is played by the technique of breathing;[67] now this technique has found its highest development in the Indian *Yoga*, where it is commonly regarded as the most important instrument of mental discipline. Again, Abulafia lays down certain rules of body posture, certain corresponding combinations of consonants and vowels, and certain forms of recitation,[68] and in particular some passages of his book "The Light of the Intellect" give the impression of a Judaized treatise on *Yoga*. The similarity even extends to some aspects of the doctrine of ecstatic vision, as preceded and brought about by these practices.

For what is the reward of reaching this supreme stage of vision? We are repeatedly told by Abulafia that the visionary perceives the image of his spiritual mentor, usually visualized either as a young or as an old man, whom he not only sees but also hears.[69] "The body," Abulafia says, "requires the physician of the body, the soul the physician of the soul, to wit the students of the Torah, but the intellect (the highest power of the soul) requires a mover from outside who has received Kabbalah concerning the mysteries of the Torah and a mover from inside, *me'orer penimi*, who opens the closed doors before him."[70] Elsewhere too he differentiates between the human and the divine teacher. If need be, one could manage without the former: Abulafia assumes that his own writings may possibly replace an immediate contact between disciple and teacher,[71] yet by no means could one forego the spiritual teacher who confronts man at the secret gates of his soul. This spiritual

mentor—in Indian terminology the *Guru*—personifies the *intellectus agens* through the mythical figure of the angel Metatron, but he is also, according to certain passages, God Himself as *Shaddai*.[12] Of Metatron, the Talmud says "his name is like the name of his master,"[13] the Hebrew word for master also signifying "teacher." Abulafia applies this statement to the relation between the visionary and his *Guru*, his spiritual teacher. Its significance is seen to lie in the fact that in the state of ecstasy, man becomes aware of his intrinsic relationship with God. Although he is apparently confronted with his master, he is yet in some way identical with him. The state of ecstasy, in other words, represents something like a mystical transfiguration of the individual. This experience of self-identification with one's guide or master, and indirectly with God, is mentioned several times by Abulafia, but nowhere does he write about it with complete and utter frankness.[14] The following passage, for instance, is taken from an unpublished fragment called *The Knowledge of the Messiah and the Meaning of the Redeemer*:[15]

"This science [of mystical combination] is an instrument which leads nearer to prophecy than any other discipline of learning. A man who gains his understanding of the essentials of reality from books is called *Hakham*, a scholar. If he obtains it from the Kabbalah, that is to say from one who has himself obtained it from the contemplation of the divine names or from another Kabbalist, then he is called *Mevin*, that is, one who has insight, but if his understanding is derived from his own heart, from reflecting upon what he knows of reality, then he is called *Daatan*, that is, a gnostic. He whose understanding is such as to combine all three, to wit, scholarly erudition, insight obtained from a genuine Kabbalist, and wisdom from reflecting deeply upon things, of him I am not indeed going to say that he deserves to be called a prophet, especially if he has not yet been touched by the pure intellect, or if touched [that is to say, in ecstasy] does not yet know by whom. If, however, he has felt the divine touch and perceived its nature, it seems right and proper to me and to every perfected man that he should be called 'master', because his name is like the Name of his Master, be it only in one, or in many, or in all of His Names. For now he is no longer separated from his Master, and behold he is his Master and his Master is he; for he is so intimately adhering to Him [it is here that the term *Devekuth* is used], that he cannot by any

means be separated from Him, for he is He ["he is He" being a famous formula of advanced Moslem pantheism]. And just as his Master, who is detached from all matter, is called *Sekhel, Maskil* and *Muskal,* that is the *knowledge,* the *knower* and the *known,* all at the same time, since all three are one in Him,[76] so also he, the exalted man, the master of the exalted name, is called *intellect,* while he is actually knowing; then he is also *the known,* like his Master; and then there is no difference between them, except that his Master has His supreme rank by His own right and not derived from other creatures, while he is elevated to his rank by the intermediary of creatures."

In this supreme state, man and Torah become one. This Abulafia expresses very deftly when he supplements the old word from the "Sayings of the Fathers" about the Torah: "Turn it round and round, for everything is in it" by the words: "for it is wholly in thee and thou art wholly in it."[77]

To a certain extent, as we have seen, the visionary identifies himself with his Master; complete identification is neither achieved nor intended. All the same, we have here one of the most thoroughgoing interpretations of the meaning of ecstatic experience to which rabbinical Jewry has given birth. Hence the fact that nearly all Kabbalists who in everything else follow the steps of Abulafia, have as far as I can see recoiled from this remarkable doctrine of ecstatic identification. Let us take as an instance a little tract called *Sullam Ha-Aliyah,* "the Ladder of Ascent"—i. e., ascent to God—written in Jerusalem by a pious Kabbalist, Rabbi Jehudah Albottini, or Albuttaini one of the exiles of Spain. It contains a brief statement of Abulafia's doctrine, and its tenth chapter, which I once had an occasion to publish, describes "the paths of loneliness and the preliminaries of adhesion *(devekuth)*"; in other words, the theory of ecstaticism.[78] But nowhere does it make the slightest mention of those radical consequences of Abulafia's methods and of the images employed by him, although for the rest its description is interesting and impressive enough.

The content of ecstasy is defined by the followers of prophetic Kabbalism by yet another and even stranger term which deserves, for the unexpected turn it takes, the special attention of the psychologist. According to this definition, in prophetic ecstasy man en-

counters his own self confronting and addressing him. This occult experience was estimated higher than the visions of light usually accompanying ecstasy.[79] The Midrash says of the anthropomorphic utterances of the prophets: Great is the strength of the prophets who assimilate the form to Him who formed it,[80] that is to say who compare man to God. Some Kabbalists of Abulafia's school, however, interpret this sentence differently. The form being compared to its creator, i. e., being of divine nature, is the pure spiritual self of man departing from him during prophecy. The following fine passage has been conserved by a collector of Kabbalistic traditions:[81] "Know that the complete secret of prophecy consists for the prophet in that he suddenly sees the shape of his self standing before him and he forgets his self and it is disengaged from him and he sees the shape of his self before him talking to him and predicting the future, and of this secret our teachers said: Great is the strength of the prophets who compare the form [appearing to them] to Him who formed it. Says Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra: 'In prophecy the one who hears is a human being and the one who speaks is a human being.'[82] . . . And another scholar writes: 'I know and I understand with absolute certainty that I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, that the holy spirit is not in me and that I have no power over the "divine voice"; for of all these things I have not been found worthy, for I did not take off my dress nor did I wash my feet—and yet I call heaven and earth to witness that one day I sat and wrote down a Kabbalistic secret; suddenly I saw the shape of my self standing before me and myself disengaged from me and I was forced to stop writing!" This explanation of the occult character of prophecy as self-confrontation sounds like a mystical interpretation of the old Platonic prescript: "Recognize thyself", as "Behold thy self."

The state of ecstasy as described by Abulafia, frequently, so it seems, on the basis of personal experience, also carries with it something like an anticipatory redemption. The illuminate feels himself not only aglow with a heavenly fire, but also as it were anointed with sacred and miraculous oil. He becomes, as Abulafia puts it, by playing upon the double meaning of the Hebrew word *Mashiah*, the Lord's anointed.[83] He is, so to speak, his own Messiah, at least for the brief period of his ecstatical experience.

7

Abulafia calls his method "The Path of the Names," in contrast to the Kabbalists of his time, whose doctrine concerning the realization of the divine attributes it referred to as "The Path of the Sefiroth."[84] Only together the two paths from the whole of the Kabbalah, the Path of the Sefiroth the 'rabbinical' and that of the Names the 'prophetic' Kabbalah. The student of Kabbalah is to begin with the contemplation of the ten Sefiroth.[85] These, indeed, during meditation are to become objects of quickened imagination rather than objects of an external knowledge acquired by merely learning their names as attributes or even symbols of God.[86] For in the Sefiroth, too, according to Abulafia, there are revealed the 'profundities of the *intellectus agens*', that cosmic power which for the mystic coincides with the splendor of the Shekhinah.[87] Only from there is he to proceed to the twenty-two letters which represent a deeper stage of penetration.

For what he calls the Path of the Names, the ancient Jewish Gnostics, as we have seen, employed another term, namely *Maaseh Merkabah,* literally translated "The Work of the Chariot," because of the Celestial chariot which was supposed to carry the throne of God the Creator. Abulafia, with his penchant for playing upon words, introduces his new doctrine as the true *Maaseh Merkabah*—a term which can also be taken to mean "combination". The theory of combining the letters and names of God—that is the true vision of the Merkabah.[88] It is true that where he describes the seven stages of knowledge of the Torah, from the inquiry into the literal meaning of the word to the stage of prophecy, he draws a distinction between prophetic Kabbalism, which is the sixth stage, and the holy of holies to which it is merely the preliminary. The substance of this final stage, in which "the language which comes from the active intellect" is understood, may not be divulged even if it were possible to clothe it in words.[89] But as we have seen, Abulafia himself, despite this solemn vow, has lifted a corner of the veil.

It remains to be said that Abulafia is far from despising philosophical knowledge. Indeed, he even says in one place that philosophy and Kabbalah both owe their existence to the active intellect, with the difference that Kabbalism represents a more profound manifestation of the spirit and probes into a deeper and more

spiritual region.[90] At the same time, however, he is definitely of the opinion that certain philosophical problems are meaningless, except insofar as they serve to lead the mind astray. It is interesting to hear his comment on the dispute concerning the supposed eternity or non-eternity of the universe, by and large one of the main issues of Jewish philosophy in its struggle against pure Aristotelianism. The fact that the Torah advances no proof for either contention is explained by Abulafia by remarking that from the point of view of prophetic Kabbalism, itself the crowning achievement of the Torah, the whole question is meaningless. "The prophet, after all, demands nothing from the Torah except that which helps him to reach the stage of prophecy. What then does it mean to him whether the world is eternal or created, since its eternity can neither advance his development nor take anything away from him. And the same is true of the hypothesis that the world came into existence at a given moment."[91] Religious importance attaches solely to that which contributes to man's perfection, and that is above all else the Path of the Names. Although Abulafia himself denies the eternity of the world,[92] he is inclined to adopt a strictly pragmatic attitude and to dismiss the whole argument as sterile.

In short, Abulafia is before all else what one might call an eminently practical Kabbalist. It is true that in Kabbalistic parlance 'Practical Kabbalism' means something entirely different. It simply means magic, though practised by means which do not come under a religious ban, as distinct from black magic, which uses demonic powers and probes into sinister regions. The fact is, however, that this consecrated form of magic, which calls out the tremendous powers of the names, is not very far removed from Abulafia's method; if the sources from which he drew the elements of his doctrine are investigated more closely—a task which is outside the scope of this lecture—it becomes plain that all of them, both the Jewish and the non-Jewish, are in fact closely connected with magical traditions and disciplines. This is true both of the ideas of the mediaeval German Hasidim, which seem to have made a deep impression upon him,[93] and of the tradition of *Yoga* which in devious ways had also influenced certain Moslem mystics, and with which he may have become acquainted during his Oriental travels. But it is no less true that Abulafia himself has decisively rejected magic and condemned in advance all attempts to use the doctrine of the holy

names for magical purposes. In countless polemics he condemns magic as a falsification of true mysticism;[94] he does admit a magic directed towards one's own self, a magic of inwardness—I think that is the general name one could give to his doctrine—but none which aims at bringing about external sensory results, even though the means may be inward, permissible and even sacred. Such magic is possible, according to Abulafia, but he who practices it is accursed.[95] Already in his first known work Abulafia maintains that conjuration of demons, although as a matter of fact based on a delusive fantasy, was just good enough to strike the rabble with a healthy terror of religion.[96] Elsewhere he warns against the use of the "Book of Creation" for the purpose of creating to oneself—in the words of the Talmud—a fat calf. They who want this, he says bluntly, are themselves calves.[97]

Abulafia has resolutely taken the path that leads inwards, and I think one can say he has pursued it as far as anybody in latter-day Jewry. But this path runs along the border between mysticism and magic, and for all the irreconcilable difference that appears to exist between the two, their interrelation is more profound than is usually taken for granted. There are certain points at which the belief of the mystic easily becomes that of the magician, and Abulafia's magic of inwardness, which I have just outlined, is one of them. Although he himself escaped the danger of sliding insensibly from the meditative contemplation of the holy names into magical practices aimed at external objects, many of his successors fell into confusion and tended to expect from the inward path the power to change the outer world. The magician's dream of power and lordship over nature by mere words and strained intention, found its dreamers in the Ghetto also and formed manifold combinations with the theoretical and practical interests of mysticism proper. Historically, Kabbalism presents itself almost invariably as a combination of the two. Abulafia's doctrine of combination (*Hokhmath ha-Tseruf*) came to be regarded by later generations as the key not only to the mysteries of Divinity but also to the exercise of magical powers.

In the literature of the 14th to 16th centuries on the *Hokhmath ha-Tseruf* we find a blend of ecstatic and theosophic Kabbalism. Thus for instance a writing of this character could even be ascribed to Maimonides who appears here as a practical magician and thau-

maturge.[98] And thus instructions concerning meditation on the different possibilities of vocalizing the Tetragrammaton are given in the very awkward book *Berith Menuhah,* "Order of Calmness", which was almost the only one of these books to be printed.[99] These instructions concerning meditation describe the lights flashing up in the soul of the devotee, but at the same time dwell rather extensively on the magical application of the names of God. Yet in the two great works of the Kabbalist Josef ibn Sayah of Jerusalem, which were composed about 1540 and which we possess in manuscript, both sides of this Jewish Yoga are brought into a system and pushed to excess: meditation endeavoring to reveal ever deeper layers of the soul and more of its secret lights, and magical application of the forces of the soul thus revealed by inward meditation.[100]

Finally, it may be interesting to note, that in the writings of some Kabbalists the Great Name of God appears as the supreme object of meditation in the last hour of the martyrs. In a powerful speech of the great mystic Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi of Jerusalem (died about 1530) we find a recommendation to those who face martyrdom. He advises them to concentrate, in the hour of their last ordeal, on the Great Name of God; to imagine its radiant letters between their eyes and to fix all their attention on it. Whoever does this, will not feel the burning flames or the tortures to which he is subjected. "And although this may seem improbable to human reason, it has been experienced and transmitted by the holy martyrs."[101]

8

Of the attractive power of these ideas and practices we possess a very precious testimonial. An anonymous disciple of Abulafia's wrote a book in 1295, apparently in Palestine, in which he set forth the basic ideas of prophetic Kabbalism.[102] Discussing three paths of "expansion", i. e. of the progress of the spirit from corporeality to an ever purer spiritual apprehension of objects, he has interpolated an autobiographical account. In it he describes very accurately and without doubt reliably his own development, as well as his experiences with Abulafia and the latter's Kabbalah. He does not name Abulafia, but from the description he gives and the kindred ideas he employs, there can be no doubt to whom he alludes. This book is called *Shaare Tsedek,* "Gates of Justice." Four manuscripts of it

are extant. But only two of them[103] contain this autobiographical account which obviously in the other two has fallen a prey to that previously mentioned self-censorship of the Kabbalists who are adverse to confessions of an all too intimate character concerning mystical experiences, and before whom the author deems it necessary to apologize for his candor.

I believe it will be a good illustration for what I have been saying if I give the main parts of this account, which in my opinion, is of extraordinary psychological interest.[104]

"I, so and so, one of the lowliest, have probed my heart for ways of grace to bring about spiritual expansion and I have found three ways of progress to spiritualization: the vulgar, the philosophic, and the Kabbalistic way. The vulgar way is that which, so I learned, is practiced by Moslem ascetics. They employ all manner of devices to shut out from their souls all 'natural forms', every image of the familiar, natural world. Then, they say, when a spiritual form, an image from the spiritual world, enters their soul, it is isolated in their imagination and intensifies the imagination to such a degree that they can determine beforehand that which is to happen to us. Upon inquiry, I learned that they summon the Name, ALLAH, as it is in the language of Ishmael. I investigated further and I found that, when they pronounce these letters, they direct their thought completely away from every possible 'natural form', and the very letters ALLAH and their diverse powers work upon them. They are carried off into a trance without realizing how, since no Kabbalah has been transmitted to them. This removal of all natural forms and images from the soul is called with them *Effacement*.[105]

"The second way is the philosophic, and the student will experience extreme difficulty in attempting to drive it from his soul because of the great sweetness it holds for the human reason and the completeness with which that reason knows to embrace it. It consists in this: That the student forms a notion of some science, mathematics for instance, and then proceeds by analogy to some natural science and then goes on to theology. He then continues further to circle round this centre of his, because of the sweetness of that which arises in him as he progresses in these studies. The sweetness of this so delights him that he finds neither gate nor door to enable him to pass beyond the notions which have already been established

in him. At best, he can perhaps enjoy a [contemplative] spinning out of his thoughts and to this he will abandon himself, retiring into seclusion in order that no one may disturb his thought until it proceed a little beyond the purely philosophic and turn as the flaming sword which turned every way. The true cause of all this is also to be found in his contemplation of the letters through which, as intermediaries, he ascertains things. The subject which impressed itself on his human reason dominates him and his power seems to him great in all the sciences, seeing that this is natural to him [i. e. thus to ascertain them]. He contends that given things are revealed to him by way of prophecy, although he does not realize the true cause, but rather thinks that this occured to him merely because of the extension and enlargement of his human reason . . . But in reality it is the letters ascertained through thought and imagination, which influence him through their motion and which concentrate his thought on difficult themes, although he is not aware of this.

"But if you put the difficult question to me: 'Why do we nowadays pronounce letters and move them and try to produce effects with them without however noticing any effect being produced by them?'—the answer lies, as I am going to demonstrate with the help of *Shaddai,* in the third way of inducing spiritualization. And I, the humble so and so, am going to tell you what I experienced in this matter.

"Know, friends, that from the beginning I felt a desire to study Torah and learned a little of it and of the rest of Scripture. But I found no one to guide me in the study of the Talmud, not so much because of the lack of teachers, but rather because of my longing for my home, and my love for father and mother. At last, however, God gave me strength to search for the Torah, I went out and sought and found, and for several years I stayed abroad studying Talmud. But the flame of the Torah kept glowing within me, though without my realizing it.

"I returned to my native land and God brought me together with a Jewish philosopher with whom I studied some of Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed" and this only added to my desire. I acquired a little of the science of logic and a little of natural science, and this was very sweet to me for, as you know, 'nature attracts nature.' And God is my witness: If I had not previously acquired

strength of faith by what little I had learned of the Torah and the Talmud, the impulse to keep many of the religious commands would have left me although the fire of pure intention was ablaze in my heart. But what this teacher communicated to me in the way of philosophy [on the meaning of the commandments], did not suffice me, until the Lord had me meet a godly man, a Kabbalist who taught me the general outlines of the Kabbalah. Nevertheless, in consequence of my smattering of natural science, the way of Kabbalah seemed all but impossible to me. It was then that my teacher said to me: 'My son, why do you deny something you have not tried? Much rather would it befit you to make a trial of it. If you then should find that it is nothing to you—and if you are not perfect enough to find the fault with yourself—then you may say that there is nothing to it.' But, in order to make things sweet to me until my reason might accept them and I might penetrate into them with eagerness, he used always to make me grasp in a natural way everything in which he instructed me. I reasoned thus within myself: There can only be gain here and no loss. I shall see; if I find something in all of this, that is sheer gain; and if not, that which I have already had will still be mine. So I gave in and he taught me the method of the permutations and combinations of letters and the mysticism of numbers and the other 'Paths of the book *Yetsirah*.' In each path he had me wander for two weeks until each form had been engraven in my heart, and so he led me on for four months or so and then ordered me to 'efface' everything.

"He used to tell me: 'My son, it is not the intention that you come to a stop with some finite or given form, even though it be of the highest order. Much rather is this the "Path of the Names": The less understandable they are, the higher their order, until you arrive at the activity of a force which is no longer in your control, but rather your reason and your thought is in its control. I replied: 'If that be so [that all mental and sense images must be effaced], why then do you, Sir, compose books in which the methods of the natural scientists are coupled with instruction in the holy Names?'[108] He answered: 'For you and the likes of you among the followers of philosophy, to allure your human intellect through natural means, so that perhaps this attraction may cause you to arrive at the knowledge of the Holy Name.' And he produced books for me made up of [combinations of] letters and names and mystic num-

bers [*Gematrioth*], of which nobody will ever be able to understand anything for they are not composed in a way meant to be understood. He said to me: 'This is the [undefiled] Path of the Names.' And indeed, I would see none of it as my reason did not accept it. He said: 'It was very stupid of me to have shown them to you.'

"In short, after two months had elapsed and my thought had disengaged itself [from everything material] and I had become aware of strange phenomena occurring within me, I set myself the task at night of combining letters with one another and of pondering over them in philosophical meditation, a little different from the way I do now, and so I continued for three nights without telling him. The third night, after midnight, I nodded off a little, quill in hand and paper on my knees. Then I noticed that the candle was about to go out. I rose to put it right, as oftentimes happens to a person awake. Then I saw that the light continued. I was greatly astonished, as though, after close examination, I saw that it issued from myself. I said: 'I do not believe it.' I walked to and fro all through the house and, behold, the light is with me; I lay on a couch and covered myself up, and behold, the light is with me all the while. I said: 'This is truly a great sign and a new phenomenon which I have perceived.'

"The next morning I communicated it to my teacher and I brought him the sheets which I had covered with combinations of letters. He congratulated me and said: 'My son, if you would devote yourself to combining holy Names, still greater things would happen to you. And now, my son, admit that you are unable to bear not combining. Give half to this and half to that, that is, do combinations half of the night, and permutations half of the night.' I practiced this method for about a week. During the second week the power of meditation became so strong in me that I could not manage to write down the combinations of letters [which automatically spurted out of my pen], and if there had been ten people present they would not have been able to write down so many combinations as came to me during the influx. When I came to the night in which this power was conferred on me, and midnight—when this power especially expands and gains strength whereas the body weakens—had passed, I set out to take up the Great Name of God, consisting of seventy-two names, permuting and combining it.[107] But when I

had done this for a little while, behold, the letters took on in my eyes the shape of great mountains, strong trembling seized me and I could summon no strength, my hair stood on end, and it was as if I were not in this world. At once I fell down, for I no longer felt the least strength in any of my limbs. And behold, something resembling speech emerged from my heart and came to my lips and forced them to move. I thought—perhaps this is, God forbid, a spirit of madness that has entered into me? But behold, I saw it uttering wisdom. I said: 'This is indeed the spirit of wisdom.' After a little while my natural strength returned to me, I rose very much impaired and I still did not believe myself. Once more I took up the Name to do with it as before and, behold, it had exactly the same effect on me. Nevertheless I did not believe until I had tried it four or five times.

"When I got up in the morning I told my teacher about it. He said to me: 'And who was it that allowed you to touch the Name? Did I not tell you to permute only letters?' He spoke on: 'What happened to you, represents indeed a high stage among the prophetic degrees.' He wanted to free me of it for he saw that my face had changed. But I said to him: 'In heaven's name, can you perhaps impart to me some power to enable me to bear this force emerging from my heart and to receive influx from it?' For I wanted to draw this force towards me and receive influx from it, for it much resembles a spring filling a great basin with water. If a man [not being properly prepared for it] should open the dam, he would be drowned in its waters and his soul would desert him. He said to me: 'My son, it is the Lord who must bestow such power upon you for such power is not within man's control."

"That Sabbath night also the power was active in me in the same way. When, after two sleepless nights, I had passed day and night in meditating on the permutations or on the principles essential to a recognition of this true reality and to the annihilation of all extraneous thought—then I had two signs by which I knew that I was in the right receptive mood. The one sign was the intensification of natural thought on very profound objects of knowledge, a debility of the body and strengthening of the soul until I sat there, my self all soul. The second sign was that imagination grew strong within me and it seemed as though my forehead were going to burst. Then I knew that I was ready to receive the Name. I also that

Sabbath night ventured at the great ineffable Name of God [the name JHWH]. But immediately that I touched it, it weakened me and a voice issued from me saying: 'Thou shalt surely die and not live! Who brought thee to touch the Great Name?' And behold, immediately I fell prone and implored the Lord God saying: 'Lord of the universe! I entered into this place only for the sake of Heaven, as Thy glory knoweth. What is my sin and what my transgression? I entered only to know Thee, for has not David already commanded Solomon: Know the God of thy father and serve Him; and has not our master Moses, peace be upon him, revealed this to us in the Torah saying: Show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may there find grace in Thy sight?' And behold, I was still speaking and oil like the oil of the anointment anointed me from head to foot and very great joy seized me which for its spirituality and the sweetness of its rapture I cannot describe.

"All this happened to your servant in his beginnings. And I do not, God forbid, relate this account from boastfulness in order to be thought great in the eyes of the mob, for I know full well that greatness with the mob is deficiency and inferiority with those searching for the true rank which differs from it in genus and in species as light from darkness.

"Now, if some of our own philosophizers, sons of our people who feel themselves attracted towards the naturalistic way of knowledge and whose intellectual power in regard to the mysteries of the Torah is very weak, read this, they will laugh at me and say: See how he tries to attract our reason with windy talk and tales, with fanciful imaginations which have muddled his mind and which he takes at their face value because of his weak mental hold on natural science. Should however Kabbalists see this, such as have some grasp of this subject or even better such as have had things divulged to them in experiences of their own, they will rejoice and my words will win their favor. But their difficulty will be that I have disclosed all of this in detail. Nevertheless, God is my witness that my intention is *in majorem dei gloriam* and I would wish that every single one of our holy nation were even more excellent herein and purer than I. Perhaps it would then be possible to reveal things of which I do not as yet know . . . As for me, I cannot bear not to give generously to others what God has bestowed upon me. But since for this science there is no naturalistic evidence, its premises

being as spiritual as are its inferences, I was forced to tell this story of the experience that befell me. Indeed, there is no proof in this science except experience itself . . . That is why I say, to the man who contests this path, that I can give him an experimental proof, namely, my own evidence of the spiritual results of my own experiences in the science of letters according to the book *Yetsirah*. I did not, to be sure, experience the corporeal [magic] effects [of such practices]; and even granting the possibility of such a form of experience, I for my part want none of it, for it is an inferior form, especially when measured by the perfection which the soul can attain spiritually. Indeed, it seems to me that he who attempts to secure these [magic] effects desecrates God's name, and it is this that our teachers hint at when they say: Since licence prevailed, the name of God has been taught only to the most reticent priests.[108]

"The third is the Kabbalistic way. It consists of an amalgamation in the soul of man of the principles of mathematical and of natural science, after he has first studied the literal meanings of the Torah and of the faith, in order thus through keen dialectics to train his mind and not in the manner of a simpleton to believe in everything. Of all this he stands in need only because he is held captive by the world of nature. For it is not seemly that a rational being held captive in prison should not search out every means, a hole or a small fissure, of escape. If today we had a prophet who showed us a mechanism for sharpening the natural reason and for discovering there subtle forms by which to divest ourselves of corporeality, we should not need all these natural sciences in addition to our Kabbalah which is derived from the basic principles or heads of chapters of the book *Yetsirah* concerning the letters [and their combinations] . . . For the prophet would impart to us the secrets of the combination of consonants and of the combination of vowels between them, the paths by which the secret and active powers emanate, and the reason that this emanation is sometimes hindered from above . . . All this he would convey to us directly whereas now we are forced to take circuitous routes and to move about restrainedly and go out and come in on the change that God may confront us. For as a matter of fact every attainment in this science of Kabbalah looked at from its point of view is only a chance, even though, for us, it be the very essence of our being.[109]

"This Kabbalistic way, or method, consists, first of all, in the

cleansing of the body itself, for the bodily is symbolic of the spiritual. Next in the order of ascent is the cleansing of your bodily disposition and your spiritual propensities, especially that of anger, or your concern for anything whatsoever except the Name itself, be it even the care for your only beloved son; and this is the secret of the Scripture that 'God tried Abraham.' A further step in the order of ascent is the cleansing of one's soul from all other sciences which one has studied. The reason for this is that being naturalistic and limited, they contaminate the soul, and obstruct the passage through it of the divine forms. These forms are extremely subtle; and though even a minor form is something innately great in comparison with the naturalistic and the rational, it is nevertheless an unclean, thick veil in comparison with the subtlety of the spirit. On this account seclusion in a separate house is prescribed, and if this be a house in which no [outside] noise can be heard, the better. At the beginning it is advisable to decorate the house with fresh greens in order to cheer the vegetable soul which a man possesses side by side with his animal soul. Next, one should pray and sing psalms in a pleasant melodious voice, and [read] the Torah with fervor, in order to cheer the animal soul which a man possesses side by side with his rational soul. Next, one directs his imagination to intelligible things and to understanding how one thing proceeds from another. Next, one proceeds to the moving of letters which [in their combinations] are unintelligible, thus to detach the soul [from the senses] and to cleanse it of all the forms formerly within it. In the same way one proceeds with the improvement of his [bodily] matter by meat and drink, and improves it [the body] by degrees. As to the moving of letters we shall deal with some methods in the chapter 'Letters.' Next, one reaches the stage of 'skipping' as Scripture says, 'and his banner over me was love.'[110] It consists of one's meditating, after all operations with the letters are over, on the essence of one's thought, and of abstracting from it every word, be it connected with a notion or not. In the performance of this 'skipping' one must put the consonants which one is combining into a swift motion. This motion heats the thinking and so increases joy and desire, that craving for food and sleep or anything else is annihilated. In abstracting words from thought during contemplation, you force yourself so that you pass beyond the control of your natural mind and if you desire *not* to think, you cannot

carry out your desire. You then guide your thinking step by step, first by means of script and language and then by means of imagination. When, however, you pass beyond the control of your thinking, another exercise becomes necessary which consists in drawing thought gradually forth—during contemplation—from its source until through sheer force that stage is reached where you do not speak nor can you speak. And if sufficient strength remains to force oneself even further and draw it out still farther, then that which is within will manifest itself without, and through the power of sheer imagination will take on the form of a polished mirror. And this is 'the flame of the circling sword', the rear revolving and becoming the fore. Whereupon one sees that his inmost being is something outside of himself.[111] Such was the way of the *Urim* and *Tummim*, the priest's oracle of the Torah, in which, too, at first the letters shine from inside and the message they convey is not an immediate one nor arranged in order, but results only from the right combination of the letters. For a form, detached from its essence, is defective until it clothe itself in a form which can be conceived by imagination, and in this imaginable form the letters enter into a complete, orderly and understandable combination. And it seems to me that it is this form which the Kabbalists call 'clothing', *malbush*."[112]

NOTES TO LECTURE IV

ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND THE DOCTRINE OF PROPHETIC KABBALISM

1 ס' אשל אברהם Fuerth 1701.

2 Cf. my book חלומותיו של השבתאי ר' מרדכי אשכנזי (1938) chapter IV.

3 First published 1831. The best edition of this highly interesting book appeared in Warsaw in 1868 under the title ס' ליקוטי ביאורים.

4 Ms. British Museum 749 f. 10—28; Guenzburg 691 (formerly Coronel 129).

5 An analysis of the idea of דבקות and its development in Judaism is a desideratum. Cf. Ibn Ezra on Psalm I, 3; Nahmanides on Deuter. XI, 22

and on Job XXXI, 7; Ezra ben Solomon (published in my book כתבי יד בקבלה 1930 p. 197ff.). Ezra quotes as a saying of his teacher Isaac the Blind: עיקר עבודת המשכילים וחושבי שמו „ובו תדבקון" וכו' (Pseudo-Nahmanides on שיר השירים, 1763, f. 8d).

6 Cf. the articles on דביקות in ס' לשון חסידים (1876) f. 15 f., and in ס' דרך חסידים (1876) f. 24ff.

7 R. Phineas of Koretz gives a very illuminating paraphrase in Yiddish. He "translates" the words צריך אדם לדבק בה' *mus sich arain gain in Haschem*, cf. ס' ליקוטי שושנים (1876) p. 14.

8 Published in Berlin 1922.

9 The description of the experience of the High Priest in entering the Holy of Holies on the day of Atonement has such an ecstatical character, cf. Zohar III, 67a and 102a; *Zohar Hadash* (1885) f. 19a and 21a.

10 Cf. the bibliography.

11 Jellinek, Philosophie und Kabbala p. 23.

12 I know of some Kabbalists in Jerusalem who copied manuscripts of one of the most difficult of Abulafia's books, not in order to sell them but for the sake of their own work.

13 Jehudah Hayat in the preface to his commentary מנחת יהודה on the book מערכת האלהות Mantua 1558.

14 Moses Cordovero and Hayim Vital quote him more than once as a high authority, not to mention minor Kabbalists. Eliezer Eilenburg, a German Kabbalist (ca. 1555) says of Abulafia's אמרי שפר in rhymed prose כל איש אשר מכחיש ספר אמרי שפר הוא שכולו עמוק מרחוק חופר and איש סכל או איש כופר (Ms. New York JThS 891 f. 101a).

15 The Kabbalists used to quote all sorts of variations on Maimonides' saying (in הלכות יסודי התורה IV, 13): ואני אומר אין ראוי לטייל בפרדס אלא מי שנתמלא כריסו לחם ובשר.

16 Of two great Kabbalists of the 13th century, the brothers Jacob and Isaac Hakohen of Soria, we know on very good authority שלא היו בעלי הוראה בתלמוד cf. *Tarbiz* vol. III p. 261.

17 The following account is based chiefly on the fragment of Ab.'s אוצר עדן גנוז published by Jellinek in *Beth Ha-Midrash* vol. III p. XL ff. of the introduction. Many other details are to be found in his commentaries on his own prophetical writings, cf. Steinschneider's analysis of Ms. Munich 285 in his Catalogue of the Hebrew Mss. in Munich (1895) p. 142—146.

18 Koch, Meister Eckhart und die Juedische Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters, in Jahresbericht der Schlesischen Gesellschaft fuer vaterlaendische Kultur 1928 (p. 15 of the reprint).

19 Abulafia's commentary on the *Moreh* is extant in two versions: a) חיי הנפש Ms. Munich 408; Erlanger Memorial Collection 96 in JThS; b)

סתרי תורה of which more than 25 manuscripts are known. Some pieces of it were printed (anonymously) in the Kabbalistical collection לקוטי שכחה ופאה (Ferrara 1556) f. 23—31.

20 According to אוצר עדן גנוז Ms. Oxford 1580 f. 17a.

21 The list of these commentaries is printed in *Beth Ha-Midrash* vol. III p. XLII.

22 מפתחות הקבלה Ms. Paris 770[4]; JThS 835, cf. my article on the author and the book in EJ III col. 1105.

23 ואני אומר לכתוב ואיני רשאי ואני אומר שלא לכתוב ואיני יכול להניח לגמרי, לכן אני כותב ומניח וחוזר עוד בו במקום אחר וכן דרכי.

24 In 1279 he is full of praise for these pupils, cf. the passage in Jellinek's גנזי חכמת הקבלה German part p. 17 note 4. By 1282 he writes rather coolly about them (ספר החיים Ms. Munich 285f. 21b) and 1285 he says bitterly יצאו לתרבות רעה כי נערים בלי מדע היו ועזבתים (*Beth Ha-Midrash* III p. XLI).

25 Cf. MGWJ vol. 36 (1887) p. 558.

26 Fragments of one of these earlier works ס' מפתחות רעיון are extant in Ms. Vatican 291; of the book גט השמות in Ms. Oxford 1658.

27 A. H. Silver, A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel (1927) p. 146 has been the first to see this connection.

28 The account is published in MGWJ vol. 36 p. 558.

29 ספר האות published by Jellinek in Jubelschrift zum 70. Geburtstage des Prof. H. Graetz (1887) p. 65—85.

30 MGWJ vol. 36 p. 558. Zinberg, The History of Jewish Literature vol. III (1931) p. 52 quotes a poem of one of Abulafia's admirers who complains bitterly of these persecutions. Solomon ben Adreth attacked him for his activities in Sicily as a prophet and quasi-Messiah (cf. שו"ת הרשב"א No. 548).

31 ספר האות p. 76.

32 In his מפתח החכמות on Genesis Ms. Parma Derossi 141 f. 16b and 28b.

33 Ibid f. 16b: ואין ספק שיש מהם קצת חכמים שיודעים זה הסוד ודברו עמי בסוד וגלו לי שזוהי דעתם בלא ספק ואז דנתים אני ג"כ בכלל חסידי אומות העולם ואין לחוש על דברי הפתאים בשום אומה שלא ניתנה תורה אלא לבעלי הדעת.

34 Ibid f. 28b: ומאותו היום והלאה נדר על עצמו לקבל ממני שום דבר מסתרי התורה והתאהב עמי וקבעתי בלבו חץ חשק ידיעת השם עד שהודה ואמר משה אמת ותורתו אמת ואין צורך לגלות מענין הגוי יותר מזה.

35 Cf. Landauer in Literaturblatt des Orients vol. VI (1845) col. 473. He even speaks of Abulafia as a "rationalistic Christian" (!), ibid. col. 590. The same misinterpretation is given by S. Bernfeld.

36 Cf. ספר האות p. 71. The Mss. of his books are full of polemical passages, especially the גן נעול Ms. Munich 58[4] (partly incorporated into the ס' הפליאה 1784 f. 50—56).

37 Cf. ספר האות p. 71 col. b. He enlarges on such "trinitarian" ideas, especially in the ספר מליץ using the terminology of אלוה, בן אלוה, and רוח הקדש for the three aspects of the intellect which are explained in other metaphors in the passage quoted in note 75. In ס' החשק Ms. Enelow Memorial Coll. 858 of the JThS f. 26b he says: ואם יאמר לך אדם שהאלהות שלשה אמור לו שקר וכזב שכן שלשה בגימטריא שק"ר וכז"ב.

38 Cf. גנזי חכמת הקבלה Hebrew part p. 19; Philosophie u. Kabbala p. 38. One of Ab.'s treatises, ס'מצרף לכסף וכור לזהב Ms. Sassoon 56 is written especially against טעות מחשבתו של תלמיד אחד מתלמידיו שהאמין בספירות וכי אין לנו בידיעתם כי אם קריאת שם לכל ספירה בלבד ולא ציור ענין כלל.

39 Cf. his ענין הנבואה, a very illuminating piece (from the ס' חיי הנפש) published by Jellinek in the collectanea following his edition of the ספר האות p. 86.

40 Ms. Enelow Memorial Coll. in the JThS § 702 f. 22b: ויקרא בשמי אברהם אברהם ואומר הנני. וילמדני באורח משפט... ויעירני כאיש אשר יעור משנתו לחבר דבר מחודש לא חובר בזמני דבר ממנו... והכרחתי רצוני והשלחתי ידי במה שהוא למעלה מיכולתי מעט, בראותי דורי קוראים אותי מין ואפיקורוס בעבור שהייתי עובד אלהים באמת ולא כפי דמיון העם ההולכים בחושך. ובעבור היותם הם ודומיהם נשקעים בתהום, היו שמחים כשהיו יכולים להשקיעני גם אני בהבליהם ובמחשך מעשיהם אך חלילה לי מעשות זאת כי לא אעזוב דרכי האמת בעד דרכי השקר. His epistle וזאת ליהודה ed. Jellinek in Auswahl kabbal. Mystik p. 13—28 is one of his refutations of personal attacks. Here he says likewise: כי לא קדמני אדם מקובל להבר בקבלה ספרים מבוארים יותר ממני לפי מיני שני חלקית הנזכרים, בספירות ובשמות.

41 Cf. the text printed in Philosophie und Kabbala p. 44 to which must be added the introductory part found in my book כתבי יד בקבלה p. 26.

42 In the preface of his ספר החשק Ms. Enelow Memorial Coll. (in JThS) No. 858 f. 2b היודע אמיתת המציאות יהיה יותר עניו ושפל מזולתו.

43 Literaturblatt des Orient vol. VI col. 345. S. Bernfeld (in דעת אלהים) and Guenzig have accepted Landauer's theory without research of their own.

44 Proof of the accuracy of the description now following is to be found in the translation appended to this lecture, and in Abulafia's great systematic manuals, especially the אמרי שפר and אור השכל.

45 He refers to התרת קשרי החותמות cf. גנזי חכמת הקבלה p. 18 (the phrase occurs several times in his unpublished writings).

46 Ibid. p. 20.

47 *Samdhi-nirmocana Sutra* ou Sutra détachant les noeuds, ed. Lamotte, Paris 1935.

48 Thus he parallels the meaning of the metaphor בהגיעי אל השמות ובהתירי את קשרי החותמות.

49 ס' גן נעול Ms. Munich 58 f. 322b. The text of the passage is printed in the ס' פליאה (1784) f. 52d/53a.

50 Philosophie und Kabbala p. 15; חכמת הצירוף היא חכמת ההגיון הפנימי העליון.

51 Cf. אמרי שפר Ms. Munich 285 f. 75b: גם נגזר (מלת אותיות) מלשון ביאת ענין והוא תרגום בענין העולם הבא שביארוהו עלמא דאתי ופירשו בסוד עולם האותיות.

52 In his ספר מליץ in the same Ms. he says: כל אות עולם בפני עצמו אצל הקבלה.

53 Cf. ספר האות p. 71; Philosophie und Kabbala p. 20 where he uses the phrase צריך להתיך (!) כל הלשונות אל לשון הקדש עד שכל דיבור שיזכירהו המדבר בפיו ובשפתיו יחשבנו כאלו הוא מחובר מאותיות הקודש שהם כ"ב אותיות. In his אור השכל part VII, he gives the *Gematria* האותיות = שבעים לשונות-צירוף.

54 חיי עולם הבא (written 1280). I know of about 25 manuscripts. Further details cf. in my book כתבי יד בקבלה p. 24—30.

55 אור השכל (written 1285) extant in no less than fifteen Mss. I have used Ms. Munich 92. Already Jellinek has justly pointed out that this is an exceedingly interesting work, cf. Philosophie und Kabbala p. 39.

56 אמרי שפר (written 1291), also extant in about fifteen Mss. I have used Ms. Munich 285. ספר הצירוף in Ms. Paris Bibl. Nat. 774.

57 Cf. e. g. Philosophie und Kabbala p. 18—20.

58 A full elaboration of the technique of association has been published by me (from ס' סולם העליה) in *Kirjath Sefer* vol. XXII (1945) p. 161—171.

59 Ibid. p. 44—45, from ס' חיי עולם הבא. I have translated several passages in accordance with the better readings of Ms. 8^0 540 of the Hebrew University Library.

60 These seven stages are described by Abulafia in his שבע נתיבות התורה Philosophie und Kabbala p. 1—4.

61 Cf. כתבי יד בקבלה p. 25.

62 Ibidem. In his אמרי שפר, Abulafia says: דע כי נהר די נור נגיד ונפיק מן קדמוהי. וצריך המצרף לשמור ולהזהר מפחדו לכבוד שמו פן יברח ממנו דמו והיה הוא הורג את עצמו אבל אם רץ לבו ישוב למקומו כי מפתח השם בידו.

63 ספר עדות Ms. Munich 285 f. 37b: ודע שרוב המראות שראה רזיאל כולם נבנו על שם המפורש ועל חדוש התגלותו עתה בארץ בימיו אשר לא היה כן מאדם ועדיו. Cf. also the passage quoted in note 40.

64 ס' חיי הנפש printed at the end of ספר האות p. 85.

65 ס' חיי הנפש Ms. Munich 408 f. 67a: המקובלים הם בני הנביאים ותלמידיהם.

66 Particularly in his commentaries on Maimonides' *Moreh*.

67 Examples of this are to be found in כתבי יד בקבלה p. 27, 29; Philosophie und Kabbala p. 40—41; Moses Cordovero's ס' פרדס רמונים ch. XXI, 1 (from Abulafia's ספר הנקוד).

68 See the sources quoted in the last note.

69 Cf. the passage published in my book כתבי יד בקבלה p. 27.

70 ס' מפתח הספירות Ms. Ambrosiana (Milano) 53 f. 157b: ושכלו צריך אל מניע מקובל מסתרי התורה מחוץ ואל מעורר פנימי לפתוח לו השערים הסגורים לפניו בסוד אמתת הספירות והשמות שהבריאות השכלית היא השגת מדת התפארת המחייבת הנבואה... והחולי הוא העדר זה.

71 Cf. אמרי שפר Ms. Munich 285 f. 90a: האיש אשר אלה תאריו הוא אשר ראוי לו הקבלה כולה כאשר היא ומפני שלא יצטרך איש כזה אל רב שימסרנה לו ויספיק לו מה שימצא כתוב בזה הספר ממנה... ואם ימצא עליו רב מה טוב, ואם לאו יעבור עם מה שימצא ממנה בזה הספר.

72 ספר עדות Ms. Munich 285 f. 39b Abulafia quotes his own prophecy i.e. the divine voice speaking to him, and gives his own interpretation. „קום והקם ראש משיחי" — הוא חיי הנפשות; „תמשחהו כמלך" — מכח כל השמות; „כי אני משחתיהו למלך על ישראל ועל קהלות ישראל"... „ו ש מ ו ק ר א ת י ש ד י ב ש מ י" — שסודו שדי גשמי [sic!] תבין כל הכוונה וכן מאמרו „ו ה ו א א נ כ י ו א נ כ י ה ו א" ואי אפשר לגלות בזה מפורש יותר מזה שסוד השם הגשמ"י הוא משי"ח השם.

73 *Sanhedrin* 38a: שמו כשם רבו. The words מטטרון and שדי have the same numerical value 314.

74 Cf. כתבי יד בקבלה p. 25; ס' האות p. 70—71.

75 ידיעת המשיח וחכמת הגואל Ms. Munich 285 f. 26b. The Hebrew text reads: כי זאת החכמה לבדה היא הכלי הקרוב לנבואה יותר משאר חכמות. ואמתת המציאות כשידענה האדם מתוך מה שלמד מן הספרים המורים עליה, יקרא חכם. וכשידענה בקבלה שמסר לו מי שידענה על פי השמות או מי שקבלה מפי מקובל, יקרא מבין. אבל מי שידעה מתוך לבו על פי משא ומתן שנושא ונותן בינו לבין עצמו על מה שהגיע לידו מן ענייני המציאות, יקרא דעתן. ואמנם מי שידע אמתת המציאות על דרך שנקהלו בלבו אלו הג' עניינים הנזכרים שהם החכמה מרוב למוד והבינה המקובלת מפי המקובלים האמתיים והדעת מרוב משא ומתן במחשבה, איני אומר שזה האיש יקרא נביא לבד אלא בכל עת שפעל ומהשכל לא התפעל או התפעל ולא השיג שממנו התפעל — אבל אם התפעל והשיג שהתפעל (ממנו) דין הוא אצלי ואצל כל שלם להקרא בשם מורה על היות שמו כשם רבו אם בשם אחד או יותר, ואם בכל שמותיו, מפני שהוא לא נפרד מרבו והנה הוא רבו ורבו הוא שכבר דבק בו דבוק שאי איפשר להפרידו ממנו בשום סבה כי הוא הוא (!). וכמו שרבו הנפרד מכל חומר יקרא תמיד שכל משכיל מושכל אשר שלשתם ענין אחד בו לעולם בפועל, כן זה המיוחד בעל השם המיוחד יקרא שכל בעת שישיג בפועל ואז יהיה מושכל משכיל שכל בפועל כרבו. ואין ז:ז הבדל ביניהם אלא מפני שרבו תכלית מעלתו בעצמו ולא בזולתו מן הנבראים כולם, וזה הגיע אל מעלתו על ידי הנבראים ובאמצעותם.

76 This is in accordance with Maimonides' theology and borrowed therefrom.

77 מפתח הספירות Ms. Ambrosiana 53 f. 164b: הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולא בה וכולת בך וכולך בה.

78 Cf. כתבי יד בקבלה p. 225—230.

79 Cf. my article, Eine Kabbalistische Deutung der Prophetie als Selbstbegegnung, in MGWJ vol. 74 (1930) p. 285—290.

80 *Gen. Rabba* ed. Theodor p. 256.

81 Cf. the complete text in the article quoted in note 79.

82 This statement is found in Ibn Ezra's commentary on Daniel X, 21.

83 On the ecstatic sensation of anointment cf. the quotation from Abulafia in Johanan Alemanno ס' שער החשק ed. Halberstadt 31a;כתבי יד בקבלה p. 228. On משיח השם cf. the passage quoted in note 72.

84 The terms דרך השמות and דרך הספירות occur very often, cf.גנזי חכמת הקבלה p. 15, 17.

85 ס' גן נעול Ms. Munich 58 f. 322b.

86 Cf. the passage quoted in note 38.

87 The Sefiroth are עמקי השכל הפועל in the passage from גן נעול (note 85). The שכל הפועל is זיו השכינה Ms. Jerusalem 8^0 540 f. 13b.

88 Philosophie und Kabbala p. 11.

89 Ibid. p. 4.

90 Cf. מפתח החכמות Ms. Parma Derossi 141 f. 19a. אין הקבלה מכחשת מה שגילתה החכמה כי אין בין החכמה ובין הקבלה אלא שהקבלה הוגדה מפי השכל הפועל ביותר עמוקה ממה שהוגדה החכמה עם היות שתי התגדות מפיהו א"כ (הקבלה) הגדה יותר דקה.

91 The same Ms. f. 12b ff. ואמנם הנביא לא יבקש מכל התורה כולה אלא מה שמספיק להביאו לידי הנבואה. כי מה לו אם העולם קדמון או חדש וקדמותו לא תוסיף לו מעלה ולא יפחות מדרגתו שאשר היה כבר היה... ואם כן מה שישלימהו הוא ענין השמות.

92 He had been attacked for defending the eternity of the world, as related by him in גן נעול Ms. Munich 58 f. 327b. Elsewhere he suggests a solution of his own for the problem.

93 Cf. Jellinek, Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik, German part p. 20; Steinschneider in Hebr. Bibliographie vol. XIV p. 8 and p. VII (corrections).

94 Cf. Philosophie und Kabbala p. 22, 43—44.

95 כתבי יד בקבלה p. 30 and the words of his disciple quoted on p. 150.

96 ס' מפתח רעיון Ms. Vatic. 291 f. 29a in a lengthy passage.

97 ס' נר אלהים Ms. Munich 10 f. 172b ספר אל יעלה במחשבתך שגעון חוקרי יצירה כדי לברוא עגלא תליתאה שהמבקשים לעשות כן עגלים הם (cf. *Sanhedrin* 65b).

98 מגלת סתרים published in Edelmann's חמדה גנוזה (1856) f. 42—45; cf. my remarks on it in *Tarbiz* vol. VI No. 3 p. 94.

99 ברית מנוחה first edition Amsterdam 1648. In Kabbalistical manuscripts there still exist a large number of other works of this genre including some fairly interesting ones in the very valuable Ms. Sassoon 290.

100 These two books are אבן השהם Ms. Jerusalem 8⁰ 416 (cf. כתבי יד בקבלה p. 89—91) and ס' שארית יוסף Ms. Vienna, Library of the Jewish Community 260 (Schwarz p. 203—204).

101 Cf. the text published in *Kirjath Sepher* vol. VII (1930/31) p. 153.

102 Cf. כתבי יד בקבלה p. 34 and *Kirjath Sepher* vol. I p. 127—139.

103 Mss. Jerusalem and Columbia University Library X 893—Sh 43. Several pages of the autobiography have been lost by accident and are not included in the latter Ms. The two other Mss. are Leiden (Warner 24, 2) and Gaster 954 (now in the British Museum).

104 The original text was published by me in *Kirjath Sepher* I (1924) p. 130—138. In some places, particularly in the last part, my translation follows the much better readings of Ms. Leiden. Some passages at the beginning and at the end have not been translated as having no direct connection with the subject matter.

105 Hebrew מחיקה. This is indeed the Sufic term *mahw*. Abulafia himself alludes to this notion when he says, with reference to the Name, that he is חקיקה שאין לה מחיקה — a play of words on a Talmudic saying concerning שמות שאינם נמחקים cf. his סוד הנבואה (after ספר האות p. 86).

106 This description gives an accurate picture of the actual content of the bulk of Abulafia's works.

107 This שם בן ע"ב שמות is construed from letters of the three verses Exodus XIV, 19—21, each of which consists of 72 letters, cf. Blau, Das altjuedische Zauberwesen (1898) p. 139. The major part of Abulafia's ס' חיי עולם הבא is a guide to meditation on these 72 names whose parts and combinations are here inscribed in a large number of circles, each of them serving for a special meditation.

108 *Kiddushin* 71a.

109 Perhaps the correct translation should be: "For every attainment in Kabbalah is only an accident in relation to its substance, even if, for us, it be the substance itself." The Hebrew text reads: שבודאי כל מה שנשיג מן החכמה הזאת איננה רק במקרה לפי מהותה אע"פ שהיא בעצם לפי מהותינו.

110 Cant. II, 4 ודגלו עלי אהבה. The Midrash reads homiletically ודילוגו as though God says "and his skipping over me." The Kabbalist gives to this "skipping" a new meaning.

111 See above p. 139, the passage on self-confrontation.

112 This degree of mystical meditation and perception of the Divine is mentioned by Moses ben Nahman in his commentary on Genesis XVIII:
הוא כבוד נברא במלאכים יקרא א צ ל ה י ו ד ע י ם מלבוש יושג לעיני בשר בזכי
הנפשות כחסידים ובני הנביאים ולא אוכל לפרש.
Abulafia himself mentions it several times in his writings. It seems to be connected with the ספר המלבוש, cf. note 132 to the second lecture.